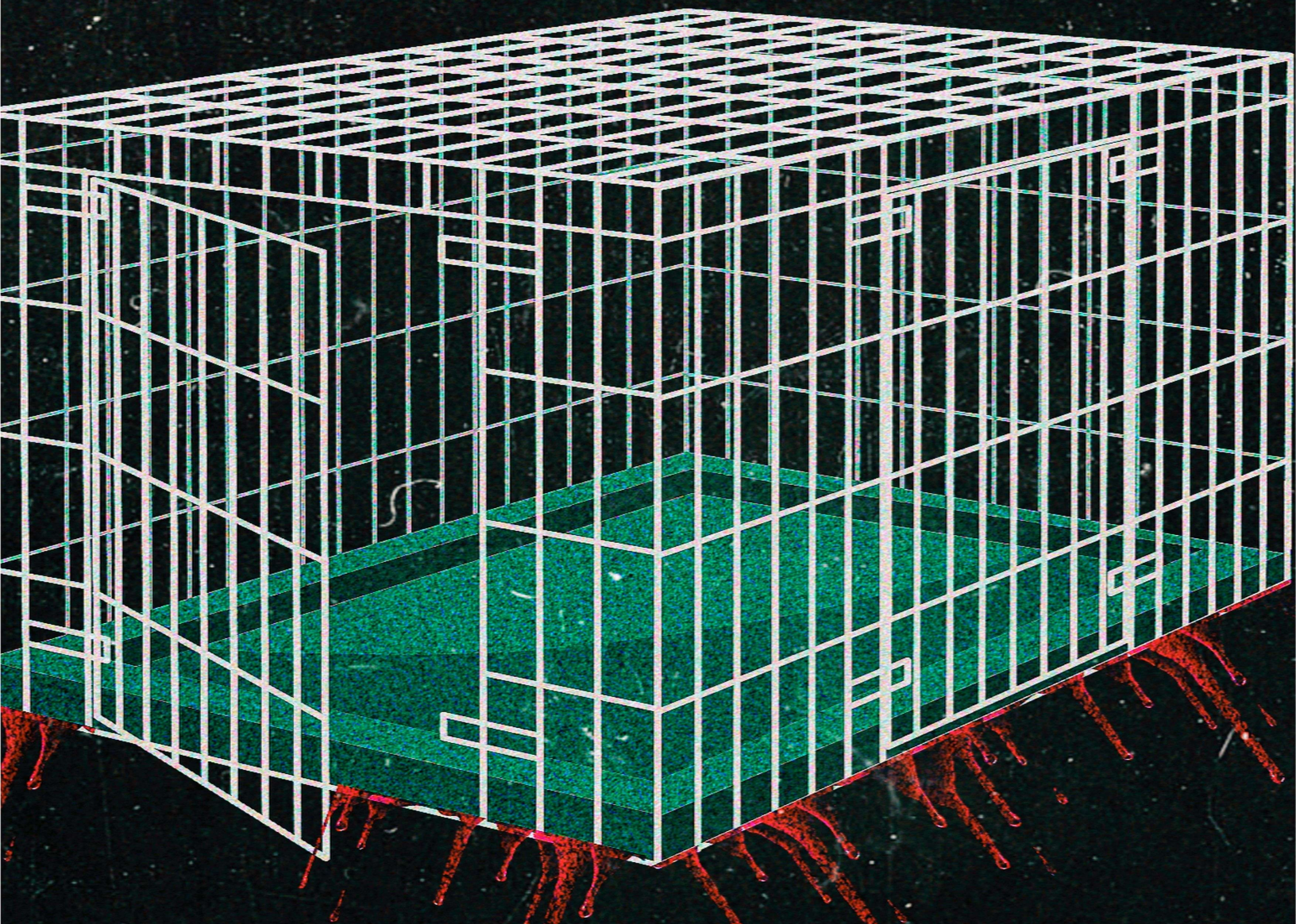
CANDACE NOLA



THE VET

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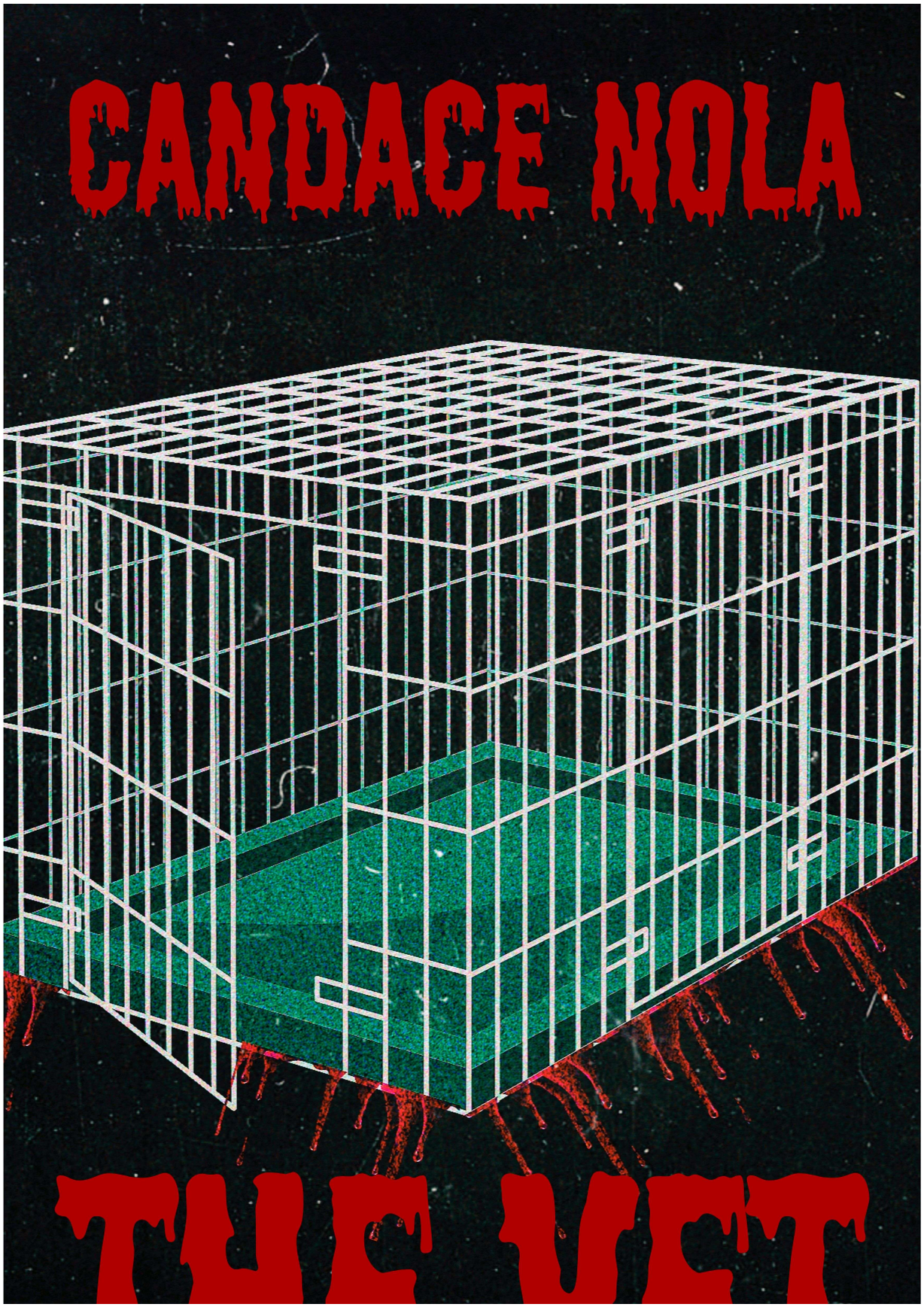

THE VET

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The Vet

Candace Nola

Uncomfortably Dark Horror

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Praise for Candace Nola

"Candace Nola has appeared on the hardcore horror scene in a huge splash of blood, soaking readers with her diabolical prose. Her work is both demented and delicious." - Kristopher Triana, author of Gone to See the River Man

"Candace Nola flits between sub genres like a chameleon shifting color to match its surroundings, all while consistently injecting horror and a sense of real danger into every story. Her words cut into the heart of the reader, digging through the darkest places to free the hope within. Even when it's only an ember, Nola manages to make it shine with her unique style."- Brennan LaFaro, author of the Slattery Falls trilogy

"Not only is Candace a champion of indie horror, she's also one of its shining stars. From Hank Flynn to Bishop to Frank Franklin, she creates

memorable characters in horrific situations that keep you coming back for more." -Eric Butler, author of Pope Lick Massacre

"*Candace Nola possesses the work ethic to match her natural writing talent-a virtue that's aided her in becoming the loved and respected author she is today. Having read some of her titles-Breach, Hank Flynn and Bishop-I can say that her stories stay with you. Nola's imagination, dedication, and skill are to be applauded.*"-James Carlson, author of Seven Exhumations

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Chapter One

CAMILLA SAT WITH THE animal in her lap, cradling its head as one eye looked wearily at her. She could see the pain in its gaze as its tongue flicked across her hand a final time before the animal went limp in her arms. A final breath passed from its nostrils as a tear slid down her cheek, dropping into the matted fur of the chocolate lab. She had been unable to save the dog from its many open wounds. Years of abuse had left the animal haggard, half-starved, and fearful of humans.

Her heart broke when animal control had brought it to her after removing it and several others from a broken-down house on the edge of town, where the worst of humanity seemed to live. She had done all she could to keep the old girl comfortable in its cage after several surgeries to try to save the creature. She sat there stroking the bit of fur left between the dogs' ears as she cried, not minding the smell that wafted through the kennel as the deceased dog released its bowels. The hot scent of feces and urine hit her nostrils, but she barely flinched. Her years as an animal surgeon had left her all but immune to such things.

The kennel was almost silent as the other animals looked on, some grieving with her with their small whimpers and whines, others staring pitifully at her from their cages, curled on blankets that had seen better days. The staff had gone for the night and Camilla had kept watch over the dog. Sitting right on the floor at the door to the open cage, letting the dog scoot forward into her lap and curl against her as much as she was able. The poor dog had only just begun to come to Camilla when she came to check

on her a few short days ago, even though she had been there for over a month and now she was gone.

Camilla let out a deep sigh and sniffed back the tears that still wanted to pour from her eyes. Her throat was locked with painful sobs that she refused to release. She wanted to hold those for later, to remind her of the pain. She wanted to hurt, to feel that rage. She would need it. Until then, she would let it burn in her chest and boil the blood in her veins as a reminder.

She gently gathered the dog to her, blankets and all, and lifted her, grunting a little as she stood. Camilla carried the animal to the back room, where she would be prepared for cremation the following morning. She went through the process of cleaning her and getting her properly settled for the night. Once she was done with that, she grabbed an assortment of treats from the bins and filled her pockets with them, and headed back out to the kennel area. She went through her nightly routine of stopping at each cage, giving treats and scratches and gentle words to each animal.

Many went to her eagerly, while the new ones watched warily from the corners of the cages, not yet trusting human hands or intentions. She was patient and spent a minute or two with each dog, cat, bunny, and ferret. The shelter had been filled for some time now, both the inner kennel and outer area where the bigger dogs were housed were brimming with discarded pets, abused rescues, and strays.

Camilla’s nightly rounds served a larger purpose than just giving treats. She was able to check on each animal for any seeping wounds from surgical treatment, check medication and see to new bandages. She checked that the water bowls were clean and full and saw to any blankets that needed

changed due to soiled cages. She loved her job, every second of it, as much as she despised the humans that made her job possible.

Camilla had spent her childhood caring for animals. Growing up in the country had afforded her the chance to be around all manner of animals and pets, everything from ducks and groundhogs to lambs and llamas. You name it; she had fed it, petted it, medicated it, groomed it and more. There was never any question that she would grow up to be a veterinarian. She was called to it. Simply put, she was made for it, took to it like a duck to water.

She finished her rounds, went back to grab medicine for those that needed it and a couple fresh blankets for two of the puppy cages. She made quick work of those items, then finally began to lock up the building for the night. She stopped in the office to retrieve her purse and coat and made her way to the parking lot.

Camilla got in her truck and let the rumble of the engine settle her for a minute. It was her father's old GMC and still carried the faint scent of tobacco and Old Spice. The seats were trimmed in cracked leather that had seen better days and the faded beige upholstery that covered the bench seat in three neat columns still carried the deep red stain from cherry soda she had spilled when she was nine.

She had outfitted the back with several large cages beneath the cap, along with all the tools of her trade for rescuing animals and transporting them back here to the shelter. Her father had once used the truck for hauling wood for the long winters, toting his tools from job to job as part of his contracting business and a whole manner of things. Now, it was hers, solely for the animals.

Camilla put the truck in gear and pulled away from the shelter, onto the dark road, and turned toward home. The solitary drive gave her time to think, sometimes too much time to think, but it allowed her time to calm her nerves from the grueling workdays and her often overloaded emotions. She used the time to think through her tasks for the night and the treatment plans for the next day. Camilla was meticulous in her planning, something necessary in her line of work.

As the dotted yellow line in the center of the road began to flash by, Camilla barely noticed, so focused on her plans for the night ahead. She let the anger bubble up once more, feeling it surge through her body. Her grip on the wheel tightened as her eyes narrowed, black thoughts swirling behind dark eyes.

CAMILLA TURNED THE OLD truck onto the dirt lane that led to her parents' house. The ramshackle farm had seen better days, but Camilla never failed to release the tension in her body as she set eyes on the white clapboard structure, outbuildings, and surrounding fields. She took a deep breath and let some of the stress go. She parked the truck by the back porch, turned the ignition to the off position, then sat there listening to the various ticks and knocks of the engine as it cooled.

She exited the truck, slammed the door behind her, hating how she still winced as she jerked her hand quickly from the frame; the reaction was an involuntary reflex created by the memory of slamming her hand in that very same door as a little girl. She never forgot the pain of that moment nor how

her nails had turned black days later. She looked at her hand in the murky light from the single bulb on the back porch, still able to make out the faded scar that ran across her knuckles. She sighed as she walked the faded path around the side of the truck to the back porch, trudged up the steps, and disappeared inside, letting the screen door slam shut behind her.

Inside the house, Camilla set her things down and began preparing the things she would need to check on the pets in the barn. Her work was truly never done, nor would it be as long as she was alive. Someone needed to care for the animals and if she gave up now, who would carry on? The barn that had once housed dozens of cows now housed animals, each one in steel cages. Animals that she could not keep in the shelter. Animals that did not belong anywhere else.

She busied herself in the kitchen preparing food, putting on a pot of coffee, flicking on light switches as she walked through the house to her room. She changed into clothes more suited for dirty work, then returned to the kitchen just as her coffee finished streaming into her favorite mug. Several tabbies purred and rubbed against her legs as she paced the room, preparing medication and food bowls.

With the cats fed and a stomach full of fresh coffee, she paused by the kitchen sink, staring at her reflection in the window. Camilla was not a pretty woman, nor was she ugly. Her grandpa used to call her handsome and somehow it seemed to fit. Broad shoulder, with strong facial features that were balanced out by her dark eyes and severe hairstyle. Her cheekbones were high, a hint at their Native American heritage.

Her eyes were dark as night, deep like vast pools of midnight, that glimmered back at her in the dirty window. The bun she wore kept her straight hair out of her face and made her cheekbones look that much more

pronounced. The full bosom hid solid muscle beneath from years of pitching hay on the farm, chopping wood, and all manner of typical farm girl things. She wasn't fat, but she was solidly built, more angles and lines than curves and softness. Handsome, strong, able-bodied, and intelligent, had this been frontier days, Camilla would have been quite the catch. A perfect homesteader wife. As it were, she was single, angry, and in love with her job rather than any human, male or female.

She rinsed her mug out and set it to dry on the dish rack, then lifted the tray of medicine and the bucket of food and stepped outside once more. The path to the barn was well worn and she could walk it with her eyes closed and often did exactly that late at night. It was an old game she played with herself as a child, seeing if she could navigate the dirt path in total darkness. These days, she could walk the entire property with her eyes closed, knowing by the feel of the land exactly where she stood on the property.

Her granddad had drilled that into her. A man should know every inch of his property, be that land, house, or wife. He would say that with a glint in his eye, not unkindly, more mischievous than anything. This was always followed by a glance behind him to see if her grandma Molly was in earshot and ready to smack his shoulder for being crass. Camilla did not yet understand what he meant, but as she grew, she began to chuckle at his outlandish remarks. This one was only one of many such phrases the old man had uttered when her father wasn't around.

She reached the barn on autopilot, caught up in her memories, and was slightly surprised when she looked to see the structure looming over her. She set the tray down on the wooden crate outside the door and pulled the heavy door open, letting the chains swing free as the padlock dropped

beside the giant crate. Camilla let her eyes adjust to the dim yellow of the bare light bulbs that ran the length of the barn then stepped inside.

Her nostrils immediately flared at the mix of feces, moldy hay, mildew, and urine that seemed to seep from every inch of the barn. Decades of animals had been housed, fed, and slaughtered here. Their very essence permeated the entire barn.

Wary eyes followed her every movement as she made her way down the rows, shoveling scoops of food into bowls, speaking a word or two to a few of the caged animals as she went. Whimpers reached her ears from some of the wounded ones, and snarls came from those that still had yet to learn. She was patient and stern with them, reprimanding them as she went, especially those that tried to attack. They were stubborn, but oh, so was she. Camilla had a stubborn streak a mile long and she would teach them to obey, one way or the other.

She finished her rounds, tossed the empty pail onto the crate outside, then flicked the lights off, leaving only a single bulb dangling in the middle of the barn. Several sets of eyes watched her go, glinting with fear and despair as she left them once again.

Camilla redid the chains, set the lock, and trudged back to the house. She refilled her coffee mug, sat heavily at the table as she sipped it while she tapped on her phone. She pulled up the application for driving directions, entered in the address she needed and set it as her next route. That done, she went over her checklist in her head, finished her coffee, then headed for the truck. Work waited for no one.

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Chapter Two

CAMILLA PULLED ONTO THE road, tapped her phone to activate the directions she needed, and set off into the darkness. She loved this time of night. The never-ending rows of corn standing sentry at the roadside, the crickets chirping, the low hoot of owls in the trees. The small town stood almost silent, nature going about its business as Camilla went about hers. She let her mind wander as she followed the spoken directions on the phone.

She thought back to the dog that had died in her arms that night. The abuse the poor animal had endured. The lab had multiple fractures that had never healed properly. Her coat was falling out in most places, matted in others. Tick and worm infested. The poor thing never had a chance. Camilla felt a new surge of anger flow through her body, and she straightened in her seat, gripping the wheel tighter. She was ready for the night ahead and her turnoff was coming up on the left.

She took it, easing the battered truck onto the gravel road. She flicked her lights down to the lowest setting and eased her foot off the gas, letting the vehicle coast quietly along the lane. She could see the house silhouetted in the distance; a lone light flickered in a downstairs window. She pulled up to the edge of the lawn, right before the driveway leading to the house, and quietly shut the truck down. Camilla got out, gently closed the door, grabbed her bag, and stealthily made her way to the side of the house, peering in windows as she went.

The house was a hovel. Garbage littered the porch and front yard. An array of poorly kept doghouses were scattered in the backyard, each one empty now, thanks to the raid last month. Half of those poor creatures had been found dead, still leashed to heavy chains that barely allowed them to reach their water dish. Anger surged through Camilla as she surveyed the state of the yard and the house.

No one decent lived here, that was obvious. She stepped up on the porch and gently tugged the screen door, unlatched just like she suspected. She slid inside, careful not to let it slam behind her. Then she cleared the few paces to the back door, knowing already it would be unlocked.

The country folk rarely locked their doors this far out. Arrogance and simplicity often went hand in hand. The kind ones trusted far too easily, and the evil fucks depended on their reputations to precede them. Either way, it worked in her favor on nights such as this. She twisted the handle, holding her breath as the door creaked upon opening. The faint moan of warped wood beneath her feet sent a tremble through her as she paused on the threshold and waited. Camilla listened intently for any sound of movement from inside, but none came.

She waited another minute, breathing slowly, controlling the rage that wanted her to burst into the house like a tornado and demolish all in her path, but that would not accomplish her goals. Patience and planning always worked in her favor. Tonight would be no different. She had an animal to rescue. It was time. She felt it in her gut. She moved into the house, swift now, a force already in motion incapable of stopping.

Camilla pulled the mask up over her face, snagged the syringe from her pocket, and set the bag down on the rumpled couch as she passed. She made her way through the living room, passed the wooden staircase, and

entered the dining room. Each room was filthier than the last. Discarded fast food bags, pizza boxes, beer cans, and animal feces covered every surface. She knew exactly where she was headed.

Camilla entered the small room to the right of the dining room. What was meant to be a sunroom had been turned into the revolting cave of the human scum that sat passed out in the threadbare recliner. The scrawny man was either drunk or high. Neither one would surprise her. Carl Benedict's temper was well known to be meaner than a basket full of cobras. His bite was much worse than his bark and three ex-wives had barely escaped with their lives, and all had the scars to prove it.

She stood there for a moment, seething with fury. Her destination was directly in front of her. Justice for the chocolate lab was mere inches away. She took a deep breath to steady herself, quietly exhaled, then readied the syringe in her hand. Quicker than a heartbeat, she lunged forward and plunged the syringe into his neck, just beneath his ear. The sedative mix would work quickly, but she knew from experience to not linger. Carl jerked once, slapped his neck, muttered, and farted as he slumped to one side.

Camilla looked on in disgust, then pulled the zip ties from her pocket. She bound his hands and ankles, then grabbed an old quilt from the nearby rattan sofa. She grabbed his ankles, slid him from the chair, rolled him into the quilt, then lifted him like one would a child. Even for a scrawny man, he was heavier than he appeared. Much of that leathery skin hid years of muscle from farming and brawling. Camilla grunted and adjusted her load, choosing to sling him over her shoulder instead.

She followed her path back through the house, grabbed her bag with one hand, and exited the way she had entered. She wasted no time trudging to

her truck, securing him inside one of the steel cages in the back, and getting in the cab. Less than fifteen minutes after her arrival, Camilla was headed home with a new animal to train.

BACK AT THE FARM, Camilla drug the unconscious man from the truck, and into the open barn. She felt the eyes of her other rescuers on her as she shoved him into the crate at the far end of the row and locked it. That crate was for her new pets. Solid steel with a few slits on the top and sides. It kept them subdued until she was ready to start training. Breaking their spirit was top on her list, breaking them was secondary, but she took the most pleasure in that part of her job.

She wiped her hands and strode out of the barn, not bothering to look back at any of the cages. This time, when she closed the barn door, she flicked all the lights off, leaving them in total darkness. She smiled at the rising whimpers of distress as she got in the truck and drove it slowly back toward the farmhouse, parking it in her usual spot.

She got out, wearily grabbed her bag, and trudged inside. Her bed waited for her, and tomorrow, the work on the new arrival would begin. She smiled at that thought. She already knew what she was going to start with. The chocolate lab had suffered multiple wounds from a taser. Camilla just happened to have several in her tool kit. She made her way to her room, turning off lights and locking doors as she went.

WHEN THE SUN BEGAN stretching pink fingers over the horizon, it shed a warm glow across Camilla. Already outside, Carl Benedict chained to a post, nude, with a heavy collar and muzzle over his head. Chains led from his neck, ankles, and wrists, keeping him on all fours on the muddy ground. Muffled grunts came from his throat as the taser bit into his groin, buzzing against the flaccid cock. Hot urine sprayed from him every time Camilla pressed the buttons on one of the three devices she held.

She had not spoken a word to him as she pulled him out of the cage, semiconscious and raving with anger. She had not uttered a word as the old drunk tried to fight her off, but Camilla was prepared for such things. She was fully dressed in training gear for K-9 dogs. Thick padding lined her arms and legs, and the syringe she held made quick work of his hostility. A micro-dose of the sedative had made him docile enough to chain, and the blast of the hose brought him back to his senses shortly after.

She paused after the last charge of electricity surged through him, causing his veins to bulge in stark relief against his pale skin. His body went rigid as the shock coursed through him, his bowels released as the surge of pain ended, and Camilla chuckled.

“You’re disgusting, Mister Benedict.” she sneered. “Call yourself a man, and out here shitting yerself like an invalid.”

“What’s the matter? Can’t handle a little pain? You sure didn’t mind inflicting pain on all those dogs you beat.” She continued, pacing around him as she spoke. “People like you make me sick. Not even human, not worthy of the air you breathe or the food you eat.”

She delivered a healthy kick to his ribcage, smirking as her boot connected and a loud pop was heard. Carl grunted and shied away from her boot, but the chains barely allowed any movement. She kicked him again, watching him flinch but not able to do anything but take it. She hit the button on the last taser, watching his body tense up. Drool ran from the bottom of the muzzle as he grunted and thrashed.

She could hear him trying to form words, but nothing except garbled noises came from beneath the leather muzzle. She crouched down right in front of him, staring at his bloodshot eyes.

“What’s that now? I can’t hear you?” She asked, cocking her head to the side as if listening. “In fact, no one can hear you, Mister Benedict, no one at all. Just like you didn’t hear all those animals whimpering and crying for help as you beat them.”

She reached forward and yanked his head up as far as it would go by his greasy hair. Snot bubbles burst from his nose as tears slid down his face, dripping from beneath the mask in a slimy mess of snot and tears.

“That chocolate lab you tortured and abused died in my arms last night. Died, scared, and whimpering right in my lap, while you sat out here in your filthy house, scratching your balls and drinking yourself into oblivion.”

“Did you think no one would care? That no one would notice her wounds? What did you think was going to happen after animal control took all those poor creatures from your property? They brought them to me, Mister Benedict, to be cared for. For me to save the ones I could and to dispose of the ones I couldn’t.” She snorted.

“Disposed of,” she repeated sadly, “like they don’t deserve no better than that. Animals are my life, sir. They are my purpose, and they are worth far

more than a sorry sack of shit like you. Hell, that lab alone was worth ten of you." She stood up and delivered a hard kick right to his throat, watching him gasp and wheeze, not even able to collapse.

Her face twisted in disgust as she watched him struggle. This one would be a delight to watch suffer. She couldn't get the big brown eyes of that lab out of her head. This one would suffer dearly for the abuse he put that girl through.

Camilla pressed the taser button again until Carl's body slumped to the side, unconscious and limp. She spit on him, yanked the prongs from his body, and walked over to the crate next to the barn doors. She put the electronic units down and selected her next tool, one of her favorite training items.

She stepped around his body in the dirt, muddied from water, urine, and the vile stream of shit that had run down his legs on the last jolt of electricity. Camilla reached her gloved hands between his legs and grabbed his sack, twisting the heavy rubber band around it as many times as she could. This was one son of a bitch that would never abuse any other animal with his diseased cock ever again.

Her stomach rolled as she twisted the band around his flesh. Images of the injuries to the dog's genitals flashed through her brain and made her sick. No animal deserved that level of depravity. She finished the banding process and stood up, wiping her hands on her padded legs.

It would take days for the worthless bit of meat to rot, causing him massive amounts of pain as it did. She smiled, walked around his body to his head, and removed the muzzle. She found it best to remove it while the pet was still passed out. Muzzling them gave her the upper hand, but oh my,

how she loved when they yelled and shrieked like the little bitches they were.

It was time to wake the bastard up. She walked to the side of the barn, grabbed the hose, and turned the water on full blast once more. Lifting the nozzle end, she squeezed the trigger, letting the icy cold well water slam into Carl with almost as much force as a power washer. His body jerked immediately as he came to and tried to thrash against his restraints. He still could only move inches.

Finally, giving up any attempt at escape, he collapsed to the ground again and tried to curl inward on himself, pathetically trying to protect his head and face from the blasting water.

Garbled groans came from his throat as he began trying to shout at her. Camilla turned the stream of water on his face, drowning out his words, smirking.

“What’s that, Carl? Did you say something?” Camilla called over the sound of the water. She snickered when more choking and gagging issued from his throat instead of words.

“gggarrgghhh.. mmffpphhh..!” The scrawny man yelled. Water blasted his face once more, cutting off his attempts at speaking. Filth covered him as he lay shuddering in the mud. Finally, Camilla turned the water off and dropped the hose. She trudged over to the shaking man and squatted down eye level with him.

“Say that again, old man.” She said. Her voice was calm, tinged with malice as her dark eyes bore into his red-rimmed ones. “I didn’t quite hear you.”

“I said, what the fuck is wrong with you, you crazy cunt? When I get loose, you’re going to wish you was dead.” He snarled, baring his rotted,

yellow teeth as he spoke. Each word clipped off like bullets fired from a gun, with all the malice he could muster, but he was too weak to be intimidating at all.

‘Oh Carl, Carl. When you get loose?“ She snickered. “You ain’t going nowhere but to the pit.” She stood up, towering over him. The sun directly behind her cast in a deep shadow over her form, making Carl squint to see her clearly.

“And sir, when I get through with you, you’ll be the dead one.” Her voice was deadly calm as she began removing the chains from the stakes holding him on the ground.

“Oh, and Mister Benedict, before you even think of taking a swing at me, you might want to check your bait and tackle first.” She gave his crotch a pointed glance and raised one eyebrow.

“I can make it much, much worse before this is over for you.”

“What the fuck have you done, you psycho bitch?” He glanced down, following her gaze to his crotch. “Why are you doing this to me? Help! Somebody help me!” Carl began to shriek as he caught sight of his balls, already swollen and beet red from the bands. Camilla cackled, then snorted as he yelled, grasping at the heavy chains around his neck.

“Let me go, bitch! Let me go, right now!”

“*Help! Help me!*“ She mocked him, then turned in a slow circle, looking around them. “Fifty acres of land, sir, no neighbors, half a mile from the lane, another three to the road. Scream all you like. No one can hear you.”

“it was just a dog, goddamnit! A goddamn dog. Who the fuck cares this much about a dog? Ain’t no crime to teach your animals to obey, you stupid cunt.”

“Well, now, good to know, because that’s exactly what I’m doing.” She sneered, tugging on the steel chains as she gathered them in her gloved hands and began to pull on them.

“Come on boy, time to go.” She called, her voice sounding every bit as if she was calling to her best boy. She tugged again, waiting for the man to follow. The chain went taut, tension strung out between them as the man dug his heels into the mud, pulling on the chain with one hand and grasping a post in the other.

Camilla turned, smirking. “That how it’s going to be?”

“Yea, bitch. Come make me.”

“Alright, then.” She said, smiling a wide grin that showed her teeth.

Fast as a viper, she whipped the chains at him, catching his chin and throat as the glass coated steel cut into his flesh. He hadn’t noticed the way the steel glinted in the sunlight or the heavy leather gloves on her hands. He shrieked, clawing at the chain that was wrapped around his neck, blood pouring from his fingers and his neck as the glass shredded his skin.

Camilla whipped another chain, wrapping his legs with it, then yanked it free. Glass sliced tender flesh. Carl howled and dropped to his knees as Camilla sent the chains flying, crisscrossing his body with steel and glass. She approached him, pulled the blade from the sheath on her hip, and sliced the back of his ankle straight through the Achilles tendon, faster than he could blink.

Blood poured. Carl screamed. Camilla pulled the man across the yard. The pit waited for him behind the barn. It was time for him to learn a new lesson and the others were waiting for her attention.

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Chapter Three

CAMILLA REACHED THE OLD well behind the barn. It had dried up long before they had dug a new, deeper well on the other side of the house. Grandpa had an ancient, haggard water witch come in with a proper set of dousing rods to help find the right spot before they dug. He swore by water witches, one of his many tales that Camilla remembered fondly.

Grandpa had been set in his ways, strict and stern but he was kind above all things. His animals were clean and healthy. Kept warm and dry when needed, and cool and comfortable in the heat of summer. Grandpa had taught her to birth calves, how to care for the many dozens of puppies and kittens that had been born on the farm over the years.

Lambs, goats, horses, dogs, and cats all had been raised here. Camilla learned almost as much about caring for animals from her grandpa as she had from veterinarian school. She could milk cows and goats, sheer a lamb, and slaughter a steer with the best of them.

She loved animals but also respected the death of them. They wasted nothing on the farm. Livestock were sold and slaughtered for food purposes only, never for sport. Grandpa would roll over in his grave if he knew what men like Carl Benedict did to his dogs, let alone to the other, less docile creatures that had been removed from his land.

Dozens of dead animals had been found there. Many used for target practice, most neglected, all beaten and broken. Mangy fur, full of worms, ribs exposed beneath emaciated bodies. Many of the larger female dogs had

been violated by more than just the depraved piece of shit she was dropping into the pit at her feet.

She watched as his body hit the rock-covered bottom with a meaty thud. Blood still sprayed from his ankle and his constant howls had not ceased. She bent and tugged the wooden cover over the dark hole, muting the noise, leaving him in darkness. Part of her hoped he bled out before she came back. The other part of her was too full of anger to want him to die slowly.

Camilla slid the two wooden planks into the slots on either side of the pit, locking it, and followed the blood-spattered trail back to the barn. As she entered the barn, muffled whimpers grew silent and bleary eyes blinked at the sudden appearance of sunshine and their mistress.

“Now, then, who’s next?” Camilla grinned. She trudged down the row, smirking as the fearful ones crouched in shit filled corners, looking for the defiant ones that still dared to meet her gaze. She stopped in front of Toby’s kennel. He had been here for a while now and still had fight in him. Might be time to dispose of him, teach the others who was in charge. He glared at her, crouched in the small cage, as defiantly as he could, while being forced to glare up at her from the tight confines.

“Got something to say, Toby?” She asked, hands on her wide hips. Her smile was mocking, and her eyes glinted with merriment. Her posture was one of complete ease and control. A Sunday school teacher overseeing a class ready for recess, cool and collected, but ever ready for the coming chaos.

Toby snarled at the question, baring his nub of a tongue. She had relieved him of his tongue shortly after his arrival on the farm. His vile comments becoming more than she was willing to listen to, day in, and day out. He had the other pets so riled up by the fourth night that she had clomped out

to the barn in her nightshirt and bunny slippers, fury on her face and blood boiling in her veins.

THE BARN HAD GONE silent when she burst inside, every creature front and center in their cage. Grasping at bars, calling her names, hurling threats. Toby's voice had been the loudest of them all. Camila grabbed a pair of pliers as she stormed past the crate of tools and stopped in front of Toby's kennel.

He lunged for her when she opened the cage, but she was ready for that and dropped him with a solid knee to his throat. The clicking sound his jaw made when it snapped shut lit joy within her, and she saw blood gush over his chin as his teeth sunk into his lower lip. He struggled to crawl fully from the kennel, grabbing onto her legs and raking his nails up her exposed shins.

She yanked him off by his hair and dropped to her knees in wrestlers pose beside him. Gripping his torso, she flipped him to the ground and straddled him. She pinned him with her legs, screaming just as loud as he was as he flailed beneath her. He tried to buck her off, but Camilla was far too strong for the chubby bully. She yanked the needle from her pocket and plunged it into his neck, pumping him full of the paralytic medication she kept on hand.

He immediately slumped beneath her, body going still, eyes wide and staring at her. He could not move. He could not speak. But he could feel. And feel he would, every ounce of pain that followed would bring joy to her raging heart.

She gripped his jaw, forced it open, and grabbed the slippery meat of his tongue with the pliers. His eyes widened in terror, tears leaked from the corners of them, and snot oozed from his nose.

She tightened her grip. He could do nothing but inhale, terror etched on his face. She snarled, caught in a feral rage, and yanked. His eyes bulged. The pliers hovered over his face, dripping bloody salvia into his open mouth and onto his pale face. She dropped the grisly bit of muscle to the ground and stood up.

She left him there on the ground and stomped back to her set of tools. She snatched a small hatchet from the box and turned back to her prey. Every set of eyes in the barn were glued to the savagery unfolding in front of them.

Camilla dropped to her knees next to him, cackling as one eye rolled loosely in his head, struggling to see, but he couldn't. She knelt on his wrist, flattened his palm, and slammed the hatchet down onto his fingers. Two strong swings and all five fingers lay gushing blood on the floor, no longer connected to a hand.. She stood up, chest heaving, heartbeat pounding in her chest.

"This is what happens when you don't learn your lesson. Do you see this? The next one of you that causes this type of chaos will be put down. You are here because you need to be treated like the animals you are. I give you what you gave your animals daily. No more, no less. None of you deserve the water I give you, let alone the food you eat." She addressed the room.

Her voice echoed around the barn as she spoke. Not a whimper was heard as she shoved Toby back into his cage. She left it open, leaving him half-inside, and trudged back to the supplies she kept on the workbench.

Camilla grabbed a length of cotton rag and went back down the row, her bunny slippers flopping as she went, blood dripping from her hair and her nightshirt. Her bun had come undone, and wild tendrils of her brown hair flowed around her like a banshee.

She quickly tied the rag around the kid's hand, stemming the blood flow, pushed him inside and rolled him up on his side so he wouldn't choke on the blood still oozing down his throat. That being done, she slammed the cage shut, and stormed down the row and slammed the door shut once more. The rest of that night had been quiet.

That had been two months ago. In that time, she had brought in and disposed of almost a whole new crop of pets, except for a few long-term residents. But Toby, she had been enjoying his misery. This kid deserved a special place in Hell. Town bully and abuser. He picked on anyone and anything smaller or weaker than himself. He spent school nights stalking the residential areas, shooting their pets with pellet guns and BB guns.

Camilla had been brought dozens of small dogs with the same kind of injuries. Some even had darts stuck in them and had bits of their fur burned off by lighters. When the police finally caught him red-handed, he had been snapping the legs of a feral kitten, giggling as he did it.

Toby was from a town about thirty miles from this one, but since Camilla ran one of the few emergency pet hospitals in the county, she had been involved in every case of animal abuse that Toby had been responsible for. She suspected there was a lot more than what had been brought to her.

No one had batted an eye when the kid went missing. His parents barely posted the flyers around their town anymore. Both were weary, sad, and broke. Camilla felt bad for them. They seemed like good people. Toby was

just evil. Some seeds are just bad, and no amount of good child rearing can change that.

She would bet her farm that the trailer they lived in would be empty before six months had passed. Toby would have done nothing but drain them for the rest of his life. All Camilla had done was relieve them of a burden of corrupt evil that should have been aborted upon conception.

She was tired. Toby had sins that went beyond bone deep in him. There was nothing left of him to save. She stood there, studying him while he glared daggers at her. He had no fingers left and half of his toes were gone. Several bones in his forearm had been crushed and three of ribs protruded from his side at harsh angles.

The defiance that still glimmered on his face told her all she needed to know. He would kill her and every pet in here the second he got the chance. The time here had not taught him contrition or repentance. There was nothing good in his battered sack of flesh and bone. Camilla would be hard pressed to believe the kid possessed a soul at all.

Done with debating, she turned her back on the cages and went to the far end of the barn. There, she flicked a light on over a single small stall and readied the few tools that she kept there. She finished with her preparations and trudged back to Toby's pen. His eyes had never left her as she moved around the barn. She grabbed the thick chain across from his pen, hefted the taser from her pocket and readied it.

"You know the drill. Now back up." She commanded him, taser aimed right at him.

He twisted his lips in a sneer and backed away, scooting on his haunches like a gorilla. Pink slobber slid from his lips as he snarled and huffed at her, puffy jowls quivering as he did so He had given up trying to speak without

a tongue weeks ago. Swearing at someone was not as much fun when it came out "*uupphh ewww*," it didn't have quite the same intensity.

Camilla lowered the cage, reached in with the chain and fastened it to his collar, then led him out. The taser stayed within inches of his face. His eyes stayed on hers. The other pets stayed silent, except the one constant whimperer. One of the two females that Camilla had not yet decided what to do with.

She led him to the stall at the far end and chained him inside. Then she stepped inside and guided his limbs into the stocks she had built there and then latched his head into place. He complied with her movements as if he knew what was coming.

Maybe Toby was ready to be free. Maybe he hoped to see her in Hell. Either way, she didn't care. She lifted the bolt gun from its hook and positioned it on his forehead. A single loud crack echoed around the barn and Toby slumped, his body only supported by the stocks that held him.

Moments later, she smelled the reek of his bowels letting go. Camilla set a pail beneath his head, slashed his throat open and left the stall. She would use the blood to mix with his organs for food for the others. Waste not, want not, had been Grandpa's motto. Words to live by for sure.

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Chapter Four

CAMILLA SPENT THE REST of the afternoon dishing out lessons and disposing of some of the other guests in the barn. Trixie was a cat lady, hoarding them like gold, but she didn't believe in food or water for animals. By the time the police had been called for a welfare check, Trixie had more than forty cats in her house. Some merely dried up husks of fur, others beyond starvation and barely able to move, while a half dozen or so had taken to eating the recently deceased ones.

Her house was a horror of its own creation, full of used junk stacked floor to the ceiling. Used adult diapers, tampons, and maxi pads filled the bathroom. Mold spread from the corners and down the walls. Cans littered the kitchen and living rooms, open cans of half-eaten beef stew, pie filling, hash and spaghetti. Hundreds of newspapers and magazines stacked the hallways.

Rats of all sizes scurried underfoot, and the corpse of Trixie's deceased, wildly obese mother had fused to their sunken couch. The body sat there covered by a sheet, massive mounds of flesh grown into the fibers of the couch. Feces and urine seeped from beneath it, pooling out like a black swamp of filth. From the state of decay, the mother had been dead at least three months.

Trixie herself had been found passed out with several of the cats on her, already tugging at loose skin that hung from her bones. A few more days, and the police would have found two corpses and forty cats.

Try as she might, Camilla could not evoke an emotional response from her. No words of sorrow, no begging or pleading. Nothing but quiet grunts of pain or shrill shrieks whenever Camilla had punished her. Toes had been cut off, one by one, with tin snips. Her fingernails had been removed, then her remaining teeth. Each one pulled from her rotting mouth that was already a fetid cesspool of diseased gums and decay.

She stood there for a long while, undecided on what to do next, when she finally shook her head and sighed. This one was beyond all hope. Camilla led the shambling fiend of a woman into the stall next to Toby's, ended her with a single blast of the shotgun. Dark crimson fluid, chunks of gleaming white bone, and gray loops of brain matter left a horrid painting on the wooden planks behind Trixie as she fell to the ground.

There wasn't much meat on her bones, but Camilla thought that Trixie's remaining cats would appreciate it. She would take her special food blend back to the shelter with her tomorrow for the cats to enjoy. She added the new task to her mental checklist and quickly bent down over the body, sliding the blade she kept on her hip, down the torso from neck to graying curly pubes, spilling warm blood and slick guts onto the ground. She left the stall, satisfied. She could retrieve the offal quickly after she finished her lessons for the day.

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Chapter Five

GINO WAS THE OLD pig from the defunct pizza parlor that had the best pizza in town a decade ago. When his wife left after years of abuse, a health department complaint had shut him down. Rodent droppings had been found in the flour and mold was growing in the vat of sauce that had not been completely thrown out or cleaned in six months. He had opted instead to keep pouring canned sauce into the simmering stew of bacteria and toxins.

Rotting vegetables and bad meat spoiling in a lukewarm freezer added to his list of violations, but then came the search of his basement storage room. While they expected to find more of the same rodent and spoilage problem. They found a whole other problem.

A half dozen pit bulls were crammed into a miniscule kennel along the back wall. Snarling and savage, the dogs were part of Gino's dog fighting team. They tried to attack the minute they saw people come into the room, throwing themselves against the cage, barking and growling with foam dripping from bared teeth.

Animal control had been called immediately. All six dogs had to be put down, along with the other five they found at Gino's house. Camilla had been called in to dispose of the remains. She remembered the anger that hit her when she saw their bodies. So many open wounds, so many untreated fractures.

She openly wept in front of her staff, a rare thing for her. The state of the dogs had been so horrific that it overwhelmed her. She knew at that moment

what Gino’s punishment would be. When the fighting ring had been busted, Gino and two of his buddies had vanished soon after.

Naturally, everyone assumed they had fled town while waiting for their court date. Camilla had rounded them up herself and the men had been her guests at the farm ever since. After several months of Camilla’s special punishments, she had a new idea, a better idea. For the last couple weeks, she selected one of the three men to be put in a cage match with a specially trained fighter of her own.

If her fighter failed to attack, it knew it would face a heavy punishment of its own. When Gino or his buddies failed to fight back, she would tase them into submission. They were to fight until one was dead or unconscious. Gino was the only one of the three left. She had purposely left him for last. The first man, Victor, had died of a massive heart attack during his third fight.

Her pet had slashed him open a dozen times with tooth and nails. Tore gashes in his side and down his hip, bitten a chunk from his cheek and gnawed off a toe. Victor hadn’t stood a chance. He had spent decades being a lazy slob, leeching a living off others, any way he could. The last decade he had forced dogs to fight to the death, ironically, so now had he.

The other scumbag, Earnest, had lasted almost a month before her fighter pinned him to the ground and tore his throat out with its teeth. She had to tase her own pet to get it to stop ripping the flesh from the limbs. Her creature knew no bounds. It was almost primal in its rage, survival its only thought. It had been with her the longest.

Now Camilla led it to the cage where Gino was already cowering in the corner. She locked it inside and stepped back to watch. Taser in one hand, glass coated chain in the other. Her fighter advanced, a panther stalking its

prey. The body was lean and strong, well-fed, and trained by Camilla, and sometimes rewarded with chocolate cake.

A reward for a job well done never goes unnoticed, and the same was true of her pet. A slice of cake an hour ago had already excited the creature beyond measure. Hopped up on sugar and adrenaline, the creature leapt onto Gino. A hellish scream issued from the lungs as recognition dawned. Camilla grinned as Gino howled, his ear suddenly and completely torn from his face.

Long hair covered its blood splattered face, and it grinned at Gino then licked the side of his face, leaving a slimy trail of bloody and salvia. Gripping Gino's head in both hands, her pet began to bang his head off the steel bars, shrieking with every blow. SLAM! SLAM! SLAM!

Gino's scream cut off as Camilla watched his eyes roll back in his head. Her pet jammed thumbs deep into his eye sockets, bursting the orbs as it shrieked louder, then continued to slam the skull against the steel cage. Camilla finally called it off when she saw brain matter begin to ooze down the bars. The back of Gino's skull had been crushed.

Her pet whipped around in a frenzy, glaring at her, yipping in its high-pitched voice, demanding something of her. It waited, crouching by Gino's legs. The hair dragged on the ground as it yipped at her, cocking its head to one side.

Camilla shrugged and sat back down, nodding. Her pet had a single wish. She already knew what it was. She watched as the young girl bent to Gino's crotch and ripped his manhood from his body with her teeth. A deep growl rumbled within her as she savagely pulled and yanked the fleshy appendage from the old man.

A long wail, both forlorn and victorious, left her throat when she finished. Then she spat on the body, wiped her mouth with a bloody hand and crouched on her haunches expectantly. Camilla rose and opened the gate, patting the girl on the head as she loped awkwardly beside her. Lupita no longer needed a whip or a chain.

Pit bulls were not the only thing chained in Gino's basement. Lupita had been reported missing when she was five. She had spent more than a decade in that basement of corruption being used by Gino and his cronies. Fed dog food, beaten daily, and never shown the outside world, savagery was all the girl knew.

When Camilla had shown up to get the bodies of the pit bulls, she had discovered the extra door beneath the staircase. Lupita had been chained to the floor within. She had been with Camilla for the better part of the last year.

She had never spoken a word. She could not read or write, but she understood commands, and she was a fast learner. Camilla had taught her to fight. Camilla had nursed her back to health, given her strength, and now had given her justice.

Camilla led her back to the wider stall on the opposite side of the barn. It had been a birthing stall but now housed a mattress for Lupita. Several baskets held a variety of books, clothes, and stuffed toys. Lupita loved to look at picture books and Camilla would often find her curled up with a book in one hand and a stuffed dog tucked beneath her arm.

The stuffed pit bull was her favorite. Camilla understood that she related to the animals. Having been raised with them, she seemed to identify as one. Camilla had given up on trying to get her comfortable in the house. Instead, she found her here in the barn every night, in one of the empty

cages with the other pets. So Camilla had made her a separate cage on the far side of the barn.

Call her what you will, but Camilla prided herself on doing good and just work. Cleaning up the cesspool of scum that existed in the world around her. Rescuing those that she could, disposing of those she could not. Lupita had been a rare true rescue for her. While she may never be socially accepted, she was loved and cared for here on the farm.

She left the girl in her stall, not bothering to lock the massive kennel that stood within. Lupita would lock it herself when she was ready. The girl understood that locking the cage was for her safety at night, while Camilla slept, rather than an attempt to keep her captive. Camilla headed to fetch the next pet before she called it a day.

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Chapter Six

CAMILLA WASTED NO TIME in dragging one of the newer rescues from his cage. This one had been pissing her off for quite a while now. His weeks of punishment had taken quite a toll on her, as he was a fighter. She had put the padding gear back on before getting this one from his kennel, chained him to the posts outside, forcing him to the ground on all fours, much like she had with Carl.

This man was a big, full-blown backwoods drunkard that had no problem picking on those he saw as weaker, be it animal or human. With a record a mile long and a drug habit to boot, he had been wanted on a whole slew of charges. Camilla had treated his animals on more than one occasion, and he disgusted her like few others ever had.

Inhumane conditions, sexual torture of the sows, deplorable slaughtering techniques, meat not properly inspected before sale, the list was a mile long. Many of the animals had burn marks, visible signs of being lit on fire, knife wounds, and many other signs of extreme torture. To say animal cruelty was putting it lightly.

She had reported the pig farm more than once and when Camilla finally saw he had been shut down; she made her move. She had rescued many of the pigs that had once lived there on his farm and she kept them here, with her.

As she now kept him. She had been slicing slivers of flesh from him for weeks, feeding it to his abused animals. Feeding them from the blood pails she drained from other rescues, feeding them the slop made of gristle, guts,

and viscera as she disposed of her failed rescues. The pigs were beyond savage now, but that was fine with her. She had only kept them for a singular purpose.

There was a dog run between the pig pen and where Roy was now chained and waiting and Camilla opened both gates. Then she vanished around the corner of the barn, ducked inside to grab the pail of blood that had been drained from Toby. She added a healthy scoop of brain matter from Gino and a fat handful of Trixie's intestines to the pail and headed back outside.

She carried it with her through the dog run to the pigpen, sloshing the blood trail from Roy all the way to his pigs. Then she opened the final gate, standing back for the squealing pigs to stampede along her trail, sniffing out the blood and bits of offal she had dumped onto it.

The pigs wasted no time in finding Roy. His squeals were almost as loud as the pigs as they tore into his naked flesh, tusk and tooth gouging and digging as they snorted and chewed. His screaming grew loud enough to rupture his throat as the pigs chewed through his stomach, tore his ballsack free from his crotch, and ripped chunks of flesh from his scalp.

Roy's rosy, red cheeks had been torn from his face in fat fleshy strips, and Camilla could see his yellowed teeth through the gaping holes in his jaw. As one of the pigs devoured his nose from his face, His squeals began to fade into garbled whimpering. One of the biggest sows was feasting on the pale mounds of his ass as he wailed. She dug her snout into the gaping wound she created, sinking her teeth deep into the bloody muscle beneath. Her teeth latched on and pulled large chunks of the meat free.

Camilla stood against the fence post and watched in mild amusement as the man was torn apart by the same animals he had abused. When she grew

bored, she left the pigs to do their thing and made her way back into the barn to check on Lupita.

She needed to clean up from her day, check the cages, grind fresh food for cats at the shelter and get dinner ready for her feral girl. Much to do before she could sleep, and night was swiftly falling. Whistling, Camilla trudged along the path, picking up her tools as she went. No time like the present to get started.

WHEN HER ALARM WENT off in the morning, Camilla rose with a yawn. She sat up in her bed and smiled at nothing in particular. Yesterday had been a good day. Lupita had smiled. There had been cake. Today, the shelter waited for her.

She got dressed quickly, finishing her morning routine in record time.

She took a large stack of pancakes to the barn for the girl. Tossed dog food into the remaining cages that still housed a few strays and made her way back to the house to grab her coat and waiting coffee.

She set those items in the truck, paused, shaking her head as she remembered one more item, and turned toward the barn. She retrieved the two pails of fresh, moist cat food that Toby and Trixie had so generously provided, and she was on her way back to the truck. Once inside the truck, she let the old beast rumble to life for a minute, gazing out over the farm, content in the moment.

She pulled out of the driveway and headed down the lane to the main road. Camilla rolled the window just a few inches to breathe in the morning

air as the miles flew by. The twenty minutes passed quickly, and she found herself pulling into the shelter.

Two cars were already there, along with a police cruiser. Camilla pursed her lips, grabbed her things, and headed inside, where her intern greeted her.

“Morning Doc.”

Good morning Jonas. What’s on the schedule?“ she asked, pausing at his desk.

“Mr. Jones brought in their puppy again, upset tummy. And Trudy May brought Edgar in, time for his check-up.” Jonas replied, checking the list.

“Oh, and the sheriff is in your office.” He cocked his head toward the back. “Hope that was alright. He needed to make some phone calls.”

“Of course. Can you get Edgar ready in exam one and I’ll go see what the sheriff needs.”

“On it.” The young man said and head over to the waiting room.

Camilla entered the back room and walked down the row of cages toward her office, a bright smile on her face.

“Hey Doc, good morning.” Sheriff Watson said as she opened the door. “Jonas let me in. I told him it would be fine.”

“Yes, of course. What do you got for me today?” she smiled as she sat down across from him.

“It’s a bad one, I’m afraid. Something that will require your more delicate skills.” He said pointedly.

“A new rescue?” She asked, cocking one eyebrow.

“Consider it a disposal, if you will,” Sheriff Watson replied as he stood up and handed her the file.

“Consider it done.” She said, barely looking up as he left her office, already lost in the file she held.

“No doubt. Tell Lupita the missus is bringing her cake this weekend.”

Camilla began to whistle as the sheriff’s footsteps echoed along the corridor. She stood up, locked the file in her drawer, and retraced her steps to the front door. There she waved once at the sheriff, then flipped the sign around on the door before she headed to exam room one.

The sign swayed gently on the chain before it settled into place. The bold black letters proudly declared, ***“THE VET IS IN.”***

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About the Author

Candace Nola is an award-winning author, editor, and reviewer. Her books include Breach, Beyond the Breach, Hank Flynn, Bishop and Earth vs The Lava Spiders. She has short stories in The Baker's Dozen anthology, Secondhand Creeps, American Cannibal, and Exactly the Wrong Things.

Beyond the Breach, won the "Novel of the Year" award for 2021 from the Horror Authors Guild and her Debut Novel, Breach, placed 2nd for "Debut Novel of the Year", also for the 2021 Horror Authors Guild awards. She is the publisher and editor of the 2022 Splatterpunk Award Winning Anthology "Uncomfortably Dark Presents: The Baker's Dozen."

She is the creator of UncomfortablyDark.com, which hosts her own work but focuses primarily on promoting other indie authors in the industry with weekly book reviews, interviews, and special features. Uncomfortably Dark Horror stands behind its mission to bring you the best in horror, one uncomfortably dark page at a time!

You can find her on Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Patreon, and her website, UncomfortablyDark.com. Sign up for the bi-weekly newsletter to stay up to date on the latest indie horror news, book reviews and releases!

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Also By

BOOKS

Breach- *"Lost in a world no longer her own."* Laraya Jamison is a young woman on a camping trip with close friends before the start of college classes. When they are savagely attacked by a creature that defies description, she flees into the woods, unknowingly crossing through a breach between realities. She must figure out where she is and how she got there in order to get home, but her survival depends on fighting monsters and demons that seem to have been ripped directly from her nightmares. Lost in a dark world full of creatures, hostile plant life and a banshee intent on hunting her, she must learn to confront her fears and figure out how to survive on her own. With only a curious group of insects to aid her, she battles her way through this new world, but will she survive long enough to discover the truth behind her new reality?

Beyond the Breach-One year after Laraya battled her way home from a horrifying alternate reality created from her childhood nightmares, she finds

her dreams haunted once more by visions of the banshee intent on hunting her. The guardians of the world she left behind, the Naman, are calling out to her, in her dreams, in desperation. The banshee is slaughtering the innocents of that world in an effort to pull her back. Her nightmares are calling her back to the breach, to battle once more, for the innocent and for everything she holds dear. The Naman, the Jackflies and the Pretty Things all aid her in waging war on the murderous banshee that is determined to be unleashed in her reality. Will she defeat the evil that haunts her world before it destroys her?

Hank Flynn-Hank Flynn is a tormented man. He's an outcast among humans, and condemned to confront evil, for as long as he lives. Serving a higher power, Hank wanders the earth alone, until he stumbles into Protection, Kansas. Mortally wounded and delirious after a demonic encounter, Hank Flynn is desperate for help. Wallace Bixby, a local merchant and man of faith, graciously opens his home to the broken stranger. Hank Flynn discovers the meaning of family and community, and the avenging drifter finds peace with Josie Bixby, the young woman who heals his body and his heart. The town of Protection is exactly what Hank needs, and the town needs the man with special talents, who slays demons. He deals out a unique brand of punishment to anything breaking the law, or threatening the people he loves. But when the Devil himself comes calling, Hank Flynn must risk everything for the town he now calls home.

Bishop-"*Caught between an ancient evil and a man with nothing to lose, a young girl's fate hangs in the balance."* Erin Rogers and her daughter Casey have been missing in the Alaskan wilderness for five days. Troy

Spencer is determined to find his sister and niece at any cost. Once there, a local tells Troy about a loner, Bishop, a man shrouded in secrets, who may be his only hope. As Troy sets out to find the mysterious Bishop, Casey is lost in the woods, alone and frightened, seeking help for her gravely injured mother. But she is not alone, something ancient stalks these forested trails, something evil that hungers for fresh blood. The trio soon finds themselves caught in a struggle against time as an ancient rivalry is renewed.

Earth vs The Lava Spiders-Tonight's special features takes place on a quiet Friday night in the small coastal town of Pine Grove. Strange lights appear over Shasta Island and an explosion rocks the beachfront. Fireballs rain down from the sky as lava bubbles from the hidden volcano, unleashing a nightmare of hellfire and blood on the town. Watch in horror as the Lava Spiders surge across the land, devouring every bit of hot human flesh in their midst! Who will survive the blood frenzy? Earth vs The Lava Spiders! One of three 1950's B-movie style horror stories. Be sure to check out Earth vs. The Nudist Camp Freaks by Judith Sonnet and Earth vs The Star Mummy by Lucas Mangum!

The Unicorn Killer-Frank Franklin has one goal in life, to be the world's most memorable serial killer. But he's grown bored with his routine and craves something fresh and inspiring. He longs for something that will cement his place in the history books. A late-night infomercial might be the answer to his prayers, in a most unexpected way.

Unmasked: A Dark Poetry Collection. The poetry within these pages will take the reader on a journey through the heart and soul of another. These verses bleed sorrow and heartbreak, strength and courage, penned at

the height of despair and darkness. Watch the tears tear through the mask and expose the beauty beneath.

ANTHOLOGIES

Uncomfortably Dark presents The Baker's Dozen-2021 Dark Dozen anthology & the 2022 Splatterpunk award-winning extreme horror anthology. Published by Uncomfortably Dark.

Uncomfortably Dark presents Trapped-2022 Dark Dozen anthology that explores themes of horror focused on being trapped in an unspeakable situation. Published by Uncomfortably Dark.

The Generator-quad collaboration anthology featuring Candace Nola, Eric Butler, M Ennenbach, and Nikolas P. Robinson. Published by Uncomfortably Dark.

Exactly The Wrong Things-Triple collaboration extreme horror chapbook with Joseph Monks and Franklin Wales. This is the authors' tribute to Ed Lee, Jack Ketchum, and Richard Laymon.

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